

Remarks on two European Wigeon x Northern Pintail hybrids

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Received 1st June, 1965

Introduction:

The loan of two hybrid specimens between the European Wigeon, *Anas penelope* Linnaeus and the Northern Pintail, *Anas acuta* Linnaeus, the one of known parentage and the other a wild-shot bird, has provided us with an opportunity to make a direct comparison the one with the other and so assess the characters shown by each. It has also enabled us to form an opinion as to the parentage of the wild-shot example.

Unfortunately the direction of the cross of the bird of known parentage was not recorded, but both the specimens are so very similar that there can be no doubt, in our opinion, that the wild-shot bird is of identical parentage.

This latter specimen (Hancock Museum collections) from its remarkable face pattern could easily have been thought to be a hybrid involving the American Wigeon, *Anas americana* Gmelin, but comparison with the example of known parentage shows that this is not so.

Description of specimens:

1. *Anas penelope* x *Anas acuta* ♂

Bred 1909 by Sir Richard Graham Bt., Ring No. 1909 R.G.

Shot 3 xii. 1913, Netherby, Cumberland. Carlisle Museum collection, No. 1—1914.

UPPER PARTS:

Back adjacent to neck and mantle: grey and white vermiculations, slightly coarser than in either of the parent species.

Lower back and rump: plumbeous-grey with darker centres to feathers, less pure grey than either parent.

Upper tail-coverts: proximal part whitish-grey, some with pale brownish crescents; distal coverts black with inner edges brownish-white as in Pintail; central pair elongated, in length intermediate between those of parent species.

Rectrices: as in drake Pintail.

UNDER PARTS:

Breast-shield: pale vinaceous as in drake Wigeon, rest of breast silvery-white.

Belly and vent: silvery-white, very finely vermiculated with grey. Whole of under parts show some retained eclipse plumage.

Under tail-coverts: mostly black, some outer feathers with white edges as in Pintail; a few brown and white retained eclipse feathers.

Rectrices: very pale sepia.

Flanks: vermiculated grey and white, slightly coarser than in Pintail. At root of tail whitish, faintly vermiculated grey.

WING:

Upper surface: lesser and median wing-coverts uniform grey, greater somewhat paler, with tips of ultimate series anteriorly pale grey and posteriorly Vandyke Brown (Ridgway, III. 5).

Speculum: bronze-green, intermediate between parent species, sub-terminal border black, terminal edge palest bay.

Scapulars: upper scapulars as mantle, but with dark centres. Median as mantle, upper series only with black on outer vanes to produce vestigial black patch, where in drake Pintail, prominent black flashes. Longest scapulars sepia, on outer vanes pale grey. Feather shafts and narrow adjacent area pale grey.

Primaries: sepia, darker at tips and on outer vanes.

UNDER SURFACE:

Coverts and foredge of wing: pale sepia finely vermiculated whitish; long coverts uniform pale grey.

Axillaries: white, distal half finely peppered pale sepia.

Primaries and secondaries: pale sepia.

HEAD AND NECK:

Forehead and crown: rusty-brown, merging over rest of head to nape dark coppery-brown, streaked with dark sepia.

Nape: dark metallic coppery reflections.

Back of neck: dark metallic green.

Lores to sides of neck: Clay colour (Ridgway, V.8), divided by vertical "bridle" running obliquely behind eyes, of dull greenish-black spots. Rest of cheeks surrounding eyes, blackish reflecting dull copper, most pronounced over ear-coverts and on sides adjacent to nape.

Chin, throat and front of neck: black reflecting dull green.



Wigeon x Pintail
(Left) the wild-shot bird.



Wigeon x Pintail
(Right) the wild-shot bird

2. *Anas penelope* x *Anas acuta* ♂

1st February 1948. Mouth of river Esk, Solway Firth.

This specimen being wild-shot is of unknown parentage and age: it is in full adult winter plumage. Its characters are so similar to the previous specimen that a detailed regional description is therefore unnecessary, and only the individual differences will be stressed.

Generally the bird is somewhat brighter both above and below, and the characteristic Pintail scapular markings are more accentuated.

There is a difference in the rump character for the feathers are finely vermiculated grey and buffy-white, and there are also some retained eclipse feathers. On the flanks at the root of the tail this area is more distinct and palest buff.

<i>Measurements in mm.</i>	<i>Carlisle Museum specimen 9. 1. 1914.</i>	<i>Hancock Museum specimen Irwin Coll.</i>
Wing:	= 261	= 269
Bill:		
Length from feather margin	= 40	= 42
Width at nostrils	= 17	= 18
Width at widest point	= 17	= 18
Tarsus:	= 53	= 46.5
Middle toe with claw:	= 53	= 61
Tail:	= 116	= 145

Discussion:

These two hybrids are broadly intermediate between the two parent species, except in so far as the characters of the head and neck are concerned. This is manifest in the European Wigeon breast and flank characters and in the modified Pintail upper parts.

The characters of the head and neck show varying degrees of bimaculation, as shown by hybrids of European Wigeon x Northern Shoveler, (Harrison, 1964).

It is of considerable interest that superficially the colour of the cheeks, crown and sides of neck, and the distribution of the metallic reflections bear a remarkable resemblance to the American Wigeon thus providing yet another instance of reversionary characters resembling another species being exposed by interspecific hybridisation.

However, were the latter species involved in the two present examples, one would have expected the strong vinaceous breast colour of *A. americana*, which is also the colour of the flanks in that species, to have appeared in the flanks of the hybrid individuals.

Also the metallic reflections behind the eyes in the American Wigeon are predominantly green, whereas the two hybrids reflect either green or copper according to the angle of light incidence.

C. J. O. Harrison (1963) in an extensive review of the post-ocular green stripe as a plumage character of the Anatinae, and its occurrence in a number of hybrid individuals, describes the presence of the character in the American Wigeon as a narrow ill-defined stripe mixed with black feathers, and also refers to the vestigial presence of the character in drakes of the European Wigeon.

The widespread presence of this in so many of the Anatinae as shown

by Harrison (*loc. cit.*), no doubt accounts for the green head reflections of the two hybrids herein described.

Summary:

Two hybrids between the European Wigeon and the Northern Pintail are described, one being of known parentage. While they are predominantly intermediate, the head and neck pattern shows a basic bimaculated state, and a post-ocular coppery-green stripe, which is considered to be reversionary towards the American Wigeon.

Acknowledgments:

We are very grateful to T. Tynan, of the Hancock Museum and R. W. Wagstaffe, of the City of Liverpool Museums for the loan of the wild-shot hybrid from the former museum.

For the loan of the Netherby hybrid, we are indebted to E. Blezard, of the Carlisle Museum, and also to his assistant, A. Allison, who relaxed the bird from its original mounted state into a study skin on our behalf.

We are also most grateful to Dr. Pamela Harrison for the photographs illustrating this paper.

Footnote:

Since writing this paper we have been presented with a further drake and two intersexes of this hybrid by Mrs V. M. Burnett, who reared all three from the same clutch three years ago. The drake shows the same basic features as the two specimens just described and is of known parentage, Pintail ♂ x Wigeon ♀.

References:

- Harrison, James M., 1964 Further comments on hybridisation between the European Wigeon and Northern Shoveler. *Bull. B.O.C.*, 84: 30-39.
 Harrison, C. J. O. 1963 The post-ocular green stripe as a plumage character of the Anatinae *Bull. B.O.C.* 83: 15-20.
 Ridgway, Robert 1886 *Nomenclature of Colours*. Boston.

A case of symmetrical albinism in a Skylark

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Received 2nd June, 1965

It is well known that albinism in birds can take one of several forms; that it may be minimal affecting only a few feathers; in fact it may amount from much to little, or be almost total except for a few normal feathers peculiar to the species affected. The unfeathered parts may also share in this pied state though the irides in such individuals are of normal colour, providing a ready distinction between albinism and the true and pathological albino.

As a rule such cases of the pied state exhibit an irregular distribution of the white areas, which may often be well described as a haphazard mosaic. However, cases are met with periodically in which whiteness has a curious and almost perfect symmetrical distribution.

Such a condition in a Skylark, *Alauda arvensis arvensis* Linnaeus is herein described, and as can be seen from the plate, the specimen exhibits a remarkable degree of symmetry.

The bird, in which the sex was unascertainable was obtained at Cley, Norfolk, on 1st February, 1965. The symmetrical nature of this individual is indeed remarkable; it is in fact almost numerically symmetrical, there being a difference in numbers of but one in the long remiges, *viz.*, seven white feathers in the right wing as against six in the left.